The Shawshank Redemption -- Don’t Stop Pursuing Hope and Freedom

Introduction

Pursuing hope and freedom is the right for everyone and everywhere. It’s also the theme of The Shawshank Redemption that was directed by Frank Darabont in 1994 and adapted from Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption written by Stephen King. (Storrier, 2016)¹

However, hope and freedom are almost impossible for those who live in prison. The movie of The Shawshank Redemption narrates Andy Dufresne, a banker, who is convicted of murdering his wife and her lover. In fact, he did not commit these crimes but is made to serve two life sentences back-to-back. He never gives up hope and freedom in Shawshank prison or like other prisoners surrender to the institutionalization created by the warden, Samuel Norton who is a sanctimonious hypocrite. Conversely, Andy is always trying his best to change the environment of Shawshank so that the spirits and souls of the prisoners can be redeemed. He continuously struggles to convince his fellow inmates to believe that there still exists hope, he attempts to do this by winning over beers for them via helping Captain Hadley to do tax evasion. Along with the beers he starts to expand the library by writing a letter a week at first and then two letters to state Senate for grants. His third attempt to provide hope was to play the Italian opera piece The Marriage of Figaro for all of the prisoners. For all his efforts he was thrown into solitary for two weeks, but at the same time he had helped prisoners get their high school equivalency diploma. Andy changed the lives of many of the individuals who were living in Shawshank, but more

¹ APA format was used in the paper
importantly, he completely changed the tone of their spirits. At the end of the movie, Andy escapes from the prison to seek freedom after spending approximately 20 years to chiseling a way through the wall of the prison by using a rock hammer. The commitment made by Red to Andy leads Red to the road to find Zihuatanejo where Andy lives.

**The Rhetoric of Ethos, Pathos and Logos**

The famous ancient Greek philosopher and scientist -- Aristotle, identified three types of artistic proofs – ethos, pathos, and logos (Palczewski, Ice, & Fritch, 2016). At the beginning of the movie, the lawyer asks a lot of questions to Andy and answers these questions himself. The words he said some parts are facts and **logos** which relies on “argument itself, by showing or seeming to show something” (Palczewski, Ice, & Fritch, 2016). And the court decision by the judge to Andy is **pathos** defined as an artistic proof that leads the audience “to feel emotion”. Rhetors (the lawyer in the movie) use pathos to appeal to lead audience members to particular emotional states of mind (Palczewski, Ice, & Fritch, 2016). In addition, as a lawyer, his profession seems to prove the correctness of his prosecution to Andy and that can be seen ethos which is “in the character of the speaker”, or character of a rhetor performed in the rhetorical act and known by the audience because of prior interactions (Palczewski, Ice, & Fritch, 2016). Even though we all know that prosecution is wrong according to the subsequent plots, nevertheless, the audiences believe the lawyer before we know that result.
According to the dialogues between the lawyer and Andy, we know, it seems that Andy has a motive for the killing because his wife is unfaithful to him. Besides, we do see he carries a pistol in the car that was shown in Figure 1 and parks outside the door. Moreover, from the allegation of the lawyer to Andy, “the bullets on the ground bearing his fingerprints. A broken bourbon bottle, likewise with fingerprints” (Darabont, 1994). It’s not only the evidence that testifies the crime committed by Andy but logos that convinces the audiences to believe what he said. Thereafter, the lawyer utilizes the pathos to appeal to the audience whoever sitting in the court of the movie or watching the movie. He says,

“They had sinned. But was their crime so great... as to merit a death sentence? While you think about that, think about this: A revolver holds six bullets, not eight. I submit that this was not a hot-blooded crime of passion. That at least could be understood, if not condoned… This was revenge... of a much more brutal, cold-blooded nature. Consider this: Four bullets per victim. Not six shots fired, but eight. That means that he fired the gun empty... and then stopped to reload so that he could shoot each of them again. An extra bullet per lover... right in the head” (Darabont, 1994).
The lawyer uses a question at the beginning of the above text. However, it sounds more like a rhetorical question that can emphasize the sin of Andy and has a sense of identity with audiences. In addition, although Andy keeps saying he never killed anyone and is innocent, the lawyer doesn’t believe him. The audiences might not trust him after the statement from the lawyer or they never trust him. Also, the judge accepts the conclusion drawn from the lawyer so that Andy serves two life sentences. As a viewer who doesn’t know the end of the film, the evidence presented, the just identity of the lawyer, and a nearly airtight logic analysis persuade us undoubtedly that Andy is guilty.

In the latter part of the movie, Tommy Williams comes to Shawshank. He asks Andy four years ago when he was in Thomaston what he heard from his cellmate, Elmo Blatch, who is a high-strung man and like to brag about what he has done. Elmo asked Tommy, one night he went to one rich-man’s house and wanted to steal something. Then he killed that woman and another man who is a professional golfer in the house just because he was unhappy. Afterwards, he knew she is married and her husband is a banker. That banker had been made a scapegoat for the case. In the narrative, Tommy describes why he met Elmo (logos and ethos), what character Elmo is (pathos), the reason why Elmo killed that the two people (logos), and the identities of two defunct and scapegoat (logos). Compare the words of lawyer and Tommy, the latter is more convincing to the viewer as there is a specific murder process and the motive of murder, not to mention that Elmo had confessed to the killing to Tommy.

The First Persona – Adapting Audiences to Rhetoric

Every film has itself narrative technique that tries its best to affect its audiences. In the film, there is a lot of voice-over narrations which use the first persona that is defined as the author implied by the discourse (Palczewski, Ice, & Fritch, 2016). As a voice-over, the interpretations of
Red appear 27 times that string together the beginning, the climax and the end of the film (Admin, 2014).

When the first impression of Andy to audiences is that he is a murderer, the appearance of the voice-over of Red brings a different impression to Andy. With the more vivid description of Red, a more concrete imagery about Andy swims into our mind. After Andy won three beers apiece for his coworkers, there is long narration by Red to express his inmost thoughts and what he thought of Andy.

“And that's how it came to pass... that on the second-to-last day of the job...the convict crew that tarred the factory roof in the spring of ’49... wound up sitting in a row at 10:00 in the morning... drinking icy-cold beer, courtesy of the hardest screw... that ever walked a turn at Shaw shank State Prison...We sat and drank with the sun on our shoulders and felt like free men. We could have been tarring the roof of one of our own houses. We were the lords of all creation. As for Andy... he spent that break hunkered in the shade... You could argue he done it to curry favor with the guards. Or maybe make a few friends among us cons. Me? I think he did it just to feel normal again... if only for a short while” (Darabont, 1994).

This is not the only one voice-over that shows Andy has a strong desire for freedom. As an audience, we wondered as such a person who yearns for freedom, why does Andy kill his wife and her lover? As a highly educated person, didn’t he think about the consequences of murder? With these questions, audiences would begin to doubt whether Andy committed a crime, and what will happen if Andy is innocent.

Except for the voice-over of Red, there is still a soliloquy by Brooks after being granted parole. Using the first persona “I”, Brooks depicted the great changes of outside prison that astonished
him and he tried to keep up with his job but cannot get better for his bad health. He misses the bird Jake and the unchangeable life in Shawshank and has trouble sleeping at night due to the fear of the outside world. Under considerable strain and fear, he chooses to end his life. The audience would identify with Brooks, through his monologue, how desperate he is, why he selected that way, and how 50 years in prison impact on him. In short, using of first persona through voice-over in this movie gives audiences a strong sense of identity and substitution so that they feel like they were a role of the movie and want to find the outcome with a devouring curiosity. As William C Martell said, “Voice over adds an additional layer to the story. Think of it as the icing on the cake. It’s not the cake. You can eat the cake without the icing, but it’s even better with the icing” (Martell, 2016).

**Rhetoric of Metaphors:**

Metaphors used largely in the movie are defined as a figure of speech in which two dissimilar things are said to be similar, offering a new perspective on a known issue (Palczewski, Ice, & Fritch, 2016). It helps those who are not familiar with something to learn that via another similar thing. The themes of the film are hope, freedom, and institutionalization which are hard to describe directly by words and language, but we can use a metaphor that means a common entity is utilized to explain these abstract words. Many metaphors existed whether in the dialogue or voice-over of the movie is conducive to the comprehension of the nature of characters.
There is a scene in the movie of Brooks breaking down completely when he knows he will be paroled. Afterwards, Red asks others that because he is institutionalized. He interprets, “The man's been in here 50 years, Heywood, 50 years! This is all he knows. In here, he's an important man......an educated man. Outside, he's nothing. Just a used-up con with arthritis in both hands. Probably couldn't get a library card if he tried. You know what I'm trying to say… I tell you these walls are funny. First you hate them. Then you get used to them. Enough time passes... you get so you depend on them. That's ‘institutionalized’” (Darabont, 1994).

He likens the walls to “being institutionalized” and the similarity between them is that the walls restrict the bodies of inmates and likewise institutionalization limits their spirits and thinking. Since the long-time life in Shawshank, a prison where has cruel requirements and circumstances is enough to make a man lose himself and his soul, just like Brooks. Compared with those who are gradually institutionalized, Andy is still longing to have freedom and works hard for it. After Andy
escaped from the prison, the voice-over of Red describes Andy as a bird with a bright feature whom cannot be caged. The audiences sometimes cannot feel freedom through the visual, however, they know the bird always is a symbol of freedom so that people enable to realize freedom exists in the film. Additionally, the music of *The Marriage of Figaro* played by Andy also decoded to “a bird carrying free flies into the prison” by Red. The actual words are:

“I tell you, those voices soared higher and farther than anybody in a gray place dares to dream. It was like a beautiful bird flapped into our drab cage and made those walls dissolve away. And for the briefest of moments, every last man at Shawshank felt free”

(Darabont, 1994)

*Figure 3* (Darabont, 1994)

There are two successive metaphors consisting of describing the song as bird and bird as freedom and on the other hand, it refers to that song also can be seen freedom. With the moving of scene, all of the people in the Shawshank head out of the windows and raise their heads to seek the source of song and smell of freedom. The audience cannot see “free” and “institutionalized”
as visually as a flower or an animal, yet that song resonates in their heart. At that moment, we can imagine how much shock the music brings to the people who have been in the dark and dreary cage through that two metaphors.

**Rhetoric of Identity:**

There are various roles in the film, including Brooks who is institutionalized, Andy who is always hopeful and a great man, and Red who is a strong man and gain his freedom at the end of the film. **Identity** refers to the physical and/or behavioral attributes that make a person recognizable as a member of a group (Palczewski, Ice, & Fritch, 2016). For us, sex, age, religion and so on that are a part of identities which are not fixed and can be developed through the change of social structure and our choices.

It’s not possible for inmates in Shawshank to expand the library, get a high school equivalency diploma, and even service warden for an exchange of a better life in prison until the coming of Andy. Since they all think as inmates, they are not eligible for spending taxpayer’s money, having a reasonable circumstance to live, and improving himself cultivation and education. They deny themselves while they are denied by others. Being put in prison is a beginning for criminals, they might look like a normal people. However, as time goes by and experiencing one after another harsh institution and beating by the guards and other inmates in prison, those people start identifying with their status or identity – as an inmate, who has no right to be free and enjoy hope that required by Shawshank prison and Warden Norton. This phenomenon arises not only because of the destruction comes from prison to those people, but also they accept that kind of identity to themselves and never try to resist this stereotype.

Similarly, at the early stage of society, there is no feminism for society. It is normal for all of us that women should stay at home and care for children. Nobody believes that the status of women
is inferior to men is wrong and should be corrected. Yet, with the emergence of more and more affirmative actions in modern times, the rights consciousness of women progressively awoke and they put into actions step by step which brought about that the society began to identify the equality of men and women of this view.

Andy is a pioneer in converting the perspective on the inmates to all the people, including the inmates themselves. The Warden Norton, as a non-prisoner in the film, is representative of this innocent group, even though we know he is guilty. Norton believes the professionalism of Andy and is not affected by his identity of prisoner since Andy proved his identity via doing a tax return for the guards and tax evasion for Captain Hadley. He is a return preparer, a financial auditor as well as a librarian. The identity of a prisoner is not an obstacle for Andy as other identities of him has been more recognized by people.

**Conclusion:**

The theme of the film is to search for hope, freedom, and not to be institutionalized. In the film of *The Shawshank Redemption*, it is not the walls and the prison that imprison people, but the long-time institutionalized system that makes them lose their inner selves. Under this system, human nature is suppressed and gradually worn down. It might not bad to those who are used to this kind of life, like Brooks. However, for those who are remaining hope and faith of life, institutionalization likes a mountain pressing on them, such as Andy. In the whole movie, there are not many dialogues between characters, considerable information and even the impression of Andy to the audiences come from the voice over, Red. The narrative allows the audience to stand in a clearer perspective to understand and think deeply the movie. On the way to redeem himself, Andy also worked hard to save others – Red is one who is redeemed by the influence of Andy. As the film said, “it takes a strong man to save himself, and a great man to save another”. So far, the
human beings have not stopped pursuing the footsteps of hope and freedom and have been breaking the shackles, bias, and barriers which block the way forward.


